

Green jobs could give lift

Area economy could benefit from development of alternative energy

BY JIM WAYMER

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Federal stimulus money for green-collar jobs may be a way for the Space Coast to fend off thousands of job losses from the retirement of the shuttle program next year, U.S. Rep. Suzanne Kosmas told a group of local business leaders Wednesday.

"I think we have everything it takes to use it to our advantage. This is a really good opportunity for the state of Florida and the Space Coast moving forward," Kosmas, D-New Smyrna Beach, said at a roundtable discussion at the Florida Solar Energy Center to discuss how federal stimulus money could spur clean-energy innovation in Central Florida.

Kosmas said her office has been in discussions with several alternative energy companies interested in locating in Central Florida but she would not give specifics.

"Some of it is solar. Some of it is technology for new kinds of power for automobiles," she said after the discussion.

Florida could see an estimated 95,000 new jobs per year as a result of federal stimulus dollars, Kosmas' office says. That estimate comes from a study released this month by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst commissioned by the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank.

According to the study, Florida could see a net increase of about \$8.1 billion in investment revenue and 94,725 jobs based on its share of \$150 billion in clean-energy investments annually nationwide. The estimate assumes a reduction in fossil fuel spending equivalent to the increase in clean energy investments.

But critics of large public investments in renewable energy say the green jobs that result often aren't long-lasting and can in fact cause net job loss. A recent study by researchers at Spain's King Juan Carlos University, for example, concluded that after 10 years of public investment in green jobs, Spain had lost 2.2 jobs for every one green job created.

The Spanish government criticized the study as a "simplistic, reductionist and short-term view of the problem," which had underestimated the jobs created and discounted other causes of unemployment.

New jobs on the Space Coast could tap into the intellectual capital at the Kennedy Space Center, speakers at Wednesday's roundtable said.

Ed Smeloff, a manager with SunPower Corp. in Richmond, Calif., told the group his company has committed to locating a research and development center in Florida, as long as state policies support more renewable energy. "What's very important to us is to see consistent policy in the state of Florida," Smeloff said.

SunPower, which manufactures solar cells, solar panels and solar systems, was selected by Florida Power & Light Co. to build a 10-megawatt solar plant at the Kennedy Space Center and a 25-megawatt solar plant in DeSoto County. Both plants are currently under construction.

Smeloff said the research and development facility could study, in real-time, how solar power can improve the reliability of the electricity grid.

"We haven't decided where it's going to be," Smeloff said after the discussion. "There is a certain logic in having it near the larger facilities."

His company and FPL had wanted Florida to adopt a renewable-energy standard requiring utilities to produce 20 percent of the state's energy with solar, wind and other renewable sources by 2020.

But earlier this year, a renewable-energy bill died in the House after passing in the Senate.

At the federal level, the American Clean Energy and Security Act passed the House last week, creating a cap-and-trade system and renewable energy standards. It could go to the Senate for a vote later this year.

Kosmas, who voted for the act, said the time for a clean-energy economy has arrived.

"I believe that oil is a finite resource, that ultimately, we're going to run out of it," she said, adding that Brevard has the opportunity to become a clean-energy leader.

"It's very exciting here on the Space Coast, because of the job creation possibility," she said.

Green tour. U.S. Rep. Suzanne Kosmas, whose district includes North Brevard, toured the Florida Solar Energy Center in Cocoa on Wednesday morning with its deputy director, Phillip Fairey, who showed her the photovoltaic cells in solar panels. (Photo by: Rik Jesse, FLORIDA TODAY)

Tech talk. Congresswoman Suzanne Kosmas meets with assistant research professor Marianne Rodgers at the Florida Solar Energy Center in Cocoa on Wednesday. (Photo by: Rik Jesse, FLORIDA TODAY)